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RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1313
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6057
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2359
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1960
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001468

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT SCORE SHORT TERM VICTORY
KILLING AQIM EMIR.

REF: ALGIERS 1118

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Algerian press buzzed the past two days with news of the death of key AQIM emir Sofiane Fassila, proclaiming Fassila's killing at the hands of the security services as a major government victory against terrorism. Fassila was the commander of the most active and organized AQIM group and his involvement in multiple suicide bombings marks him as a great loss for AQIM. While the killing of one key leader is certainly a blow to AQIM, his death signifies the end of an individual and not the end of an ideology. Based on AQIM's behavior this past summer, we expect AQIM to retaliate. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Many Algerian newspapers headlined on October 9 the killing of Sofiane Fassila by the Algerian security forces. The Arabic-language Algiers daily newspaper Echourouq el-Youmi, one of the most informed on Islamist issues, reported that AQIM terrorist emir Zuhir Harek (aka Sofiane abu Hydra or Sofiane Fassila) was killed along with two other terrorists in the Boghna region, in the province of Tizi Ouzou. Echourouq noted that Fassila was an elite emir and the leader of the most deadly and active group within AQIM, "Katibat Al-Ansar," that operates in the central region of Algeria.

13. (U) Fassila was behind the recent spike in suicide bombings in the troubled Kabylie region that helped make September the bloodiest month of the last ten years, according to the press. Press reporting quoted security experts saying that he was the mastermind of the April 11 suicide attack at the Prime Minister's office in Algiers in addition to the July 11 suicide bombing in Lakhdaria, Dellys and the assassination attempt in Batna against President Bouteflika. Fassila reportedly was very close to AQIM leader Abu Mosaab Abdelwoudoud aka Droukdal, and he had AQIM leader Droukdal's ear at anytime.

14. (U) According to the Echourouk October 9 article, Fassila was killed when the Algerian military opened fire on the stolen vehicle the terrorists were driving. After they refused to stop for an identity check, the driver accelerated in an attempt to escape while one of the terrorists in the back seat opened fire on the military officers stationed at the checkpoint. Three military officers were wounded during

the fight.

15. (C) Well-informed Al-Jazair news editor Hamida Ayachi told us on October 9 that the alleged death of Fassila will not have a major impact on the terrorist organization, as Fassila could be easily replaced. Indeed, Algerian newspaper le Soir d'Algerie reported on October 7 that a new emir was appointed for Katibat al-Ansar named Ali Bentouali, aka Amine. However, Ayachi did expect that AQIM would retaliate for Fassila's death with a fierce strike targeting civilians and security personnel to counter recent government propaganda on the successes of military operations against AQIM cells in the Kabylie region. (Comment: an attack that targets civilians would appear to differ from the majority of AQIM attacks, especially in the wake of the internal AQIM debate about the propriety of killing civilians. Fassila was not against killing civilians for the right cause. End Comment.)

16. (C) Ayachi added that much suspicion and doubt surrounds Fassila's death. He said that only a few newspapers were able to authenticate the identity of the terrorist killed. (Note: we believe Ayachi is referring to newspapers with close ties to the Algerian Intelligence Services (DRS) such as Echourouq and El-Khabar. End note.). Ayachi advised that we wait few days until facts emerge to get a better sense of the impact on AQIM.

17. (C) COMMENT: Although difficult to confirm, the alleged killing of AQIM emir Sofiane Fassila has already motivated the Algerian Government to use this propaganda to reassure the Algerian population that its security operations are gaining successes. Embassy Algiers has been checking AQIM and other jihadi websites to confirm Fassila's death, but so

ALGIERS 00001468 002 OF 002

far we have not found any AQIM commentary about it. AQIM usually is quick to post communiques to clarify situations, so their silence now is unusual. Whether Fassila's death is confirmed or not, we believe the perception of GOA success is sufficient to provoke a significant AQIM response, either through propaganda or actual attacks.

FORD